

RIPCORD REPORT

For Friends and Survivors of the Battle of Fire Support Base Ripcord
Republic of Vietnam • 12 March – 23 July, 1970



Number 82

Spring, 2010



Jersey Ramblings . . .

by Lee Widjeskog

Spring has quickly appeared, followed by some summer weather then back to spring!! It is almost never as we seem to remember the weather patterns when we were younger. One of the benefits and detriments of living longer is we remember when things were better even if there were a lot of bad things mixed in. With age, we now have more time to remember events and to compare recent events with the past and so we sometimes draw different conclusions than we did years ago. Events that seemed horrible as teenagers, now viewed with years of experience, we see it as a minor event. Having lived a number of decades, we generally have a broader view of our world and tend to look more at the big picture or what it all means to our life.

Now, after 40 years, the passage of time allows us to reflect about our time in Vietnam and the battles we fought. We can remember how focused most of us were about what we had to do to survive another day, week, month and year. As a junior officer, my view of the war in 1970 was a little wider than most riflemen under me but not as wide as the view held by the Captain.

In talking with many of you over the years, it becomes apparent that during a battle, the individual rifleman is very intent and focused on a very limited cone of observation while the fighting is heavy. Two men fighting side by side will have very different pictures of what happened that day depending on what caught his attention. The closer you are to the enemy, the less broad your view. Because, rightly, your survival becomes paramount in your thoughts and you concentrate all your vision and actions towards the things that you feel will hurt you in an effort to nullify their impact upon you. As they say "It's hard to remember you're here to drain the swamp when you are up to your ass in alligators!"

If the fire team leader or squad leader has time, he will have a slightly broader view and alert the rifleman to potential problems. Once you felt safe, and got control of your thoughts or when your training kicked in, you might have time to take a slightly broader view and see how you could help your buddies. The more experienced troops had

a larger view of the war and what the goals were for their squad, platoon or company. Higher in the Army ranks, the view became even broader and wider by necessity until they were not looking at just the impact in Vietnam but the impact in Asia and the world. And the results of that view and the goals associated with it filtered down the chain of command to become the mission of grunts pounding the ground. Our goal as infantrymen, once more, was to roust the enemy with the hopes the actions would help the generals and the politicians achieve their broad view of the battle and the world. With the broad view held by the ranking officers, is it any wonder that they might not remember what the grunts were going through in the effort to help attain the broad goal.

As young men, did we recognize this fact? Most likely no! By 1970 this was not a popular war. Many had been drafted, some willingly and others kicking and screaming. Try as they might, your DI had a hard time convincing all the troops about the logic of considering the sacrifice of your life for the greater good of your country. Especially difficult when the media harped on those opposed to the war and those at home had reservations about what the goals were. Unless you felt the goal of the unit was more important than your individual survival; you felt that the brass had no idea what was happening in the field and that we were alone in our attempts to survive the battle and the war. Yet we all fought to protect ourselves and the lives of our unit buddies whom we felt were at least as important as our own lives. Exceptional leaders were able to make the grunt in the field feel he was a vital cog in the battles being fought. This was difficult to do since this war had the troops scattered and person to person contact with the battalion and brigade commander was hard to accomplish if he was also to keep the higher command happy and maintain that broad view of the battle and the goals. Thus many times it was the leadership of the fireteam leader, squad leader, platoon sergeant, platoon leader or company commander that made the soldier feel he had a vital role. As we all look back 40 years ago we can

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FROM THE EDITOR

Our 40th Anniversary Reunion will be in October 2010 at The Radisson in Ft Worth Texas. The registration forms are included in this newsletter. Please respond quickly. More information will be on our website and the next newsletter. I hope to see you all there this year.

Carol Gilbert is also putting together a Ripcord Gathering in Wash. DC this June. Read more about this in this newsletter or on our website.

The Ripcord Association now has a Facebook page. Thanks to all the members that requested one get started. Anthony Critchlow has volunteered to manage the facebook page and is doing an excellent job at it.

I would like to thank all the Association members that volunteer their time and money to make the Ripcord Association what it is today. From the Ripcord Veteran to the Associate members, to the spouses, siblings, etc. Everything that goes into the reunions, from finding the location, to setting up the registrations, doing the raffles, the list list goes on and on. I can't forget those that contribute donations to our Association. I wish I could put all the names that have helped thru the years with everything because so much is taken for granted but without their help, we would have no Association.

The Ripcord Association started in 1985 with just a few Ripcord veterans and has grown to be one of the most respected Vietnam Veteran Organizations out there. We have no rules, regulations, by-laws, commanders, board of directors, or any of that. Just a group of volunteers as mentioned above and a lot of respect for each other.

Keep up the good work and continue to enjoy what we have.

E-mail address

I need your e-mail address. If you are not receiving updates and information about the Ripcord Association via e-mail, you may be missing out on a lot of news. Please go to our website and update your information. (Our website membership page is now working again)

Postal Mail Delivery

If you get the newsletter by Postal mail, and you DID NOT send the postcard enclosed in the mailed newsletter back to us, then you ARE NOT receiving this newsletter! If you wish to continue receiving the newsletter by postal mail, please contact me at frank@ripcordassociation or at my address below.

ARTICLES

Deadline for the September issue will be July 1st 2010. Please send all articles, photos, incoming mail and interesting reading to:

Frank Marshall
5 Taconia Ct
Mt Laurel, NJ 08054
or e-mail to: frank@ripcordassociation.com

Facebook

The Ripcord Association is now part of Facebook. Go to Ripcord Association page on facebook, add your comments, photos, etc. I just started this page after receiving an e-mail from Russ Dixon. Anthony Critchlow has volunteered to help with this facebook group. He will now be the administrator so all suggestions and comments should go to him. Thank you so much Anthony.

WOW!

The Ripcord Association Group on Facebook now has 141 members and 142 photos and growing every day.

Come join us now.

Ripcord Association

Great job your doing Anthony, Thanks

Donations, the life blood of our Association

The following have given donations to the Ripcord Association since the last newsletter. These donations help keep the newsletters free to all who wish to receive it.

James McCall
Mike Leiviska
Alfred Lee
John Schuelke
John Stoneburg
Darryl Reino
John Lawrence

John Flarhity
Bill Williams
Don Cabrol
Bill Payne
Gary Watrous
Wilburn Wall

DONATIONS:

Checks payable to "Ripcord Association".

Mail to:

Lee Widjeskog,
493 Stillman Ave.
Bridgeton, NJ 08302

RIPCORD REPORT

Ripcord Report is a publication of the *Ripcord Association*, and is the authoritative voice of history for the Battle of Fire Support Base Ripcord.

Ripcord Report

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Ramblings

Continued from Page 1

identify some of these people who gave us some confidence and ultimately helped us to survive the battle.

With all that said, take a broad view of your experience in Vietnam and come to the 40th anniversary of the Battle for Ripcord being held in Fort Worth. Share some of your experience and thoughts with others and you'll find that many others share the narrow view of how the war impacted you in a variety of ways. In most cases the broad view associated with time, will enlighten and help you understand that what happened to you happened to many others. The shared experience discussed by those it happened to makes the stress and shock of the past more bearable with the passage of time.

Report on the Anna Britt Nolan Trust Fund

The Trust Fund for Anna Britt continues to grow, thanks to the donations of so many caring individuals. Keith's mom tells us Britt is a good student and still loves to write, as well as talks about becoming a veterinarian.

Keep in mind that October will be here before we know it and items for the Trust Fund Raffle will be greatly appreciated.

George and Mary Murphy

Ripcord Gathering Washington, D.C. June 4th - 6th, 2010

(This is not a Ripcord Reunion. It is a gathering of Ripcord Veterans, Families and Friends)

Everyone can Attend

Carol needs to know by May 31st roughly how many will be attending this Gathering due to the transportation to D.C.. She needs a head count.

Please book now

Any questions call Carol Gilbert at
410-294-3519 or 410 672 2311

or e-mail her at carolg50@verizon.net.

HOTEL

Spring Hill Suites/Marriott
7544 Teague Rd, Hanover, Maryland 21076
410-799-7100

Room Rates \$99 plus tax

Free Breakfast,

Indoor swimming pool (bring the kids)

2010 Ripcord Reunion 40th Anniversary

October 6 - 10, 2010

Radisson Hotel

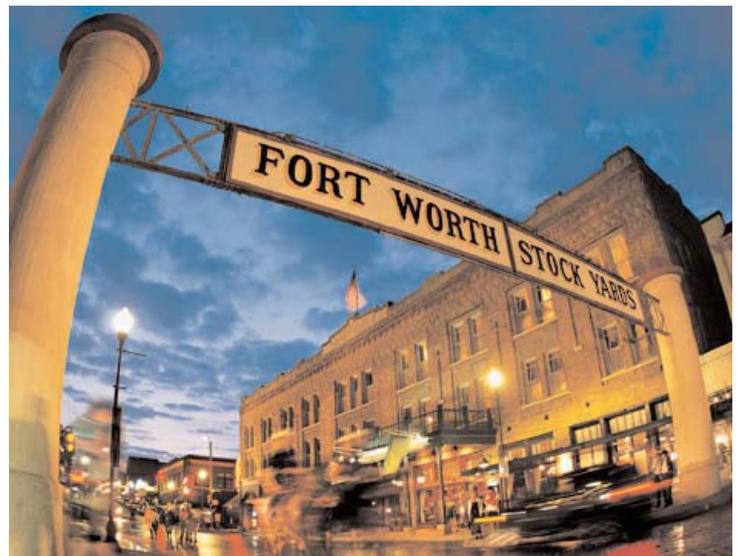
Ft Worth South, Texas



Don't miss this one!

If you have not been to a Ripcord Reunion, then this is the one you should be at!

*Make your Reservations now!
Radisson Hotel, Fort Worth South
1-817-293-3088*



Enjoy our Fort Worth, Texas Hotel's Location

The Radisson South Fort Worth Hotel's location puts you close to the adventure and excitement of the area. Our hotel is only seven miles from downtown and a short drive from area attractions, including the Fort Worth Zoo, Amon Carter Museum, Texas Motor Speedway, Fort Worth Stockyards and Billy Bob's of Texas, the world's largest honky tonk. You are sure to enjoy our Fort Worth, Texas hotel's convenient location.

INCOMING MAIL

Hi Frank, I am about to sit down and read a copy of Ripcord that my wife purchased for me at a used book sale. It is still in like new condition. I quickly browsed through it and it looks like it is going to be a really AWESOME read. I love to read the REAL stories of men who served. This book is absolutely full of autographs! It is autographed by Keith Nolan in October of 2000 as well. Now this is where the story I tell gets really interesting. This book belonged to Daniel Thompson, who presented it to "Doctor Louise Graham". There are a total of 27 signatures and brief messages in the book flyleaf pages from vets who served with him. YES! Your signature is in there too! I am not exactly sure how this ever ended up in a used book sale as it was obviously full of memories when Dan presented to Louise Graham. It just seemed such a shame to me for a book with such a personal touch to end up where it did. It always makes me feel bad to find books at the used store that have such a personal touch to them but this one was the one that bothered me the most so far. I felt I should contact someone about it just in case it had been lost by Dr. Graham or stolen from her. I tried contacting Dan at his email address in the members list but it is invalid and the message came back to me. Just thought I'd drop you a note about it.

Regards:
Al Hooper

Frank, there is not much I enjoy more than a good mystery other than a good book. I have to say, I am into page 65 now and it is spell binding.

I don't want to put it down. Very well written and so detailed! Just a super book. Absolutely the best I have read so far pertaining to the Vietnam war. Dan emailed me yesterday Frank, and I emailed him back and hope to get chance to call him soon. I am really touched by the proposed signing of the book for me. That would be absolutely fantastic! That would be something I would treasure always! I sure don't mind sending it back to Dan BUT only after I have finished reading it! GRIN It's too good to stop now and wait for another copy! I should be done with it in another week. Oh Frank, feel free to use any of our correspondence. It's definitely no problem with me. I'm just so glad I can help. Several years back my wife was metal detecting up here and found a Sterling silver US Marine service ring with no serial number engraved in it. We contacted the USMC and many other people and sites desperately trying to reconnect the owner or his family with that ring but to no avail.

Without a serial number it was a lost cause. Thanks goodness this book was so well signed!

Al

Editors Note:

Dan Thompson and Al Hooper have been corresponding back and forth. At the next reunion, I would like to have everyone autograph one of our Ripcord Books and send it off to Al Hooper.

Frank:

Was reading about Firebase Ripcord when I came across your article ... I'm not sure how long ago you posted it...But here are the lyrics from the song by Nail Michael Hagerty....I'll try to find the mp3....(put the lyrics as an attachment so you could print it separately)....

A Friend.....
William Krause

Editors Note:

*Lyrics are posted on our website
www.ripcordassociation.com*

I was involved in regular supply missions for the weeks preceding the pullout. The main pullout was a two day operation and we removed equipment as well as troops. The second day, the 23rd, my Chinook was shot down on top of Ripcord. Shortly after that a picture made Stars and Stripes of the top of Ripcord in which a flight helmet can be seen. It was my helmet and if anyone has a good copy of that photo I would greatly appreciate a copy.

Steve M Morehead
B/159th Avn Bn
stevemm2@earthlink.net

I have been inspired by the story of J. Robert Kalsu, that took me to the Ripcord story. As a Vietnam combat Veteran myself (Americal, Quang Ngai, 69-70) I was unawares except by scuddlebutt of the extent of the Ripcord battle of that year. I now travel back to Vietnam often and will be going near Ripcord in a couple of weeks (10 May, 2010)where we will be building a Library/Learning Center.

Francis J. (Chuck) Theusch
chucktheusch@yahoo.com

Lee,

Please send me a hard back copy of Ben Harrison's "Hell on a Hilltop". I was the XO of a 8"/175 gun battalion (6/27th) in II FF Arty supporting all you guys.

Clifford Don Clay

INCOMING MAIL

Hi Lee,

We never met that I know of, but who knows. I was with B Co. (Kingsmen) 101st Avn. BN as door gunner in the extraction of some grunts at the base of Ripcord either on the 22nd or 23rd. Anyway, I may try to make the reunion in Texas, as I have never been to one. Here's a few bucks to help with postage or whatever.

Respectfully,
Mike Leiviska
Mora, Minn.

Hello Lee,

I received the Winter 2010 Ripcord Report and this postcard, that I am supposed to send back to update our membership record. Thanks! I never knew you, just seen you around our 506th Battalion area at Camp Evans a few times. Anyway, I'm Native American, a Navajo Indian or Dineh and I served with "C" Co. 2/506 and later "E" Co. Recon as a team leader. Mostly all I really remember when I was in C Co. 2/506 is Lt. Campbell and Sgt. Barkey but I can't remember our CO's name. In E Co. Recon I remember John Mihalko, John Schnarr, Kenneth Dern, "Chops" that black guy from South Carolina, etc from my team.

Gosh! It is almost 40 years ago since FSB Ripcord and yes lots of memories. Most of all Lee I just want to make a donation. Keep up the good work and if possible put this in the next newsletter. I'll write again later when I want to find out more about Ripcord and in the meantime "Hello" to all you guys. God Bless!

Mr. Alfred Lee
"Chief" Navajo, New Mexico

Was a 1st platoon member w/ Lt. Wallace as platoon leader. Served w/Capt Hale & then Capt. Vasquez. Flew off Ripcord 7/10/70 to deros. Military records are under Norman D. Cooper.

Dale Cooper
C/2-506
currahee@avenuebb.com

I was wounded while on Ripcord July 19 1970 medicated out. I was the gunner for the second section of A Battery, 2nd Battalion

11th Artillery.
Larry "Tex" Bynum
bynum@taylorlortel.net

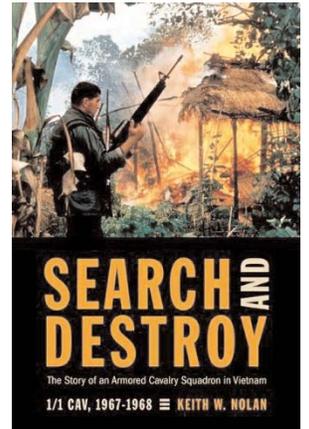
Several months ago I got in contact with Fred and Carol Gilbert. I served with Fred in Viet Nam in the 70's. After a few e-mails Fred sent me a application to join the Ripcord association. I filled out the application and sent it at least I think I sent it out. Could you let me know if you got it and if not I will fill out another to join. I think your web site is one of the best I've seen. Through the web site is how I got in touch with Fred and Carol. Keep up the good work I know there are many others out there who enjoy reading your work.

Thank You
Jay
bob.juszczak [farmer64@hotmail.com]

Dear Mr. Marshall,

Keith Nolan's final book Search and Destroy: The Story of an Armored Cavalry Squadron in Vietnam. As I'm sure you're aware, Keith passed away at the age of 44 in February 2009, after a year-long struggle with cancer. This book represents his final work as one of the premier authors of Vietnam history books, one on which he worked even while he was receiving treatment.

While this latest book doesn't deal with the men of the 101st, I thought perhaps your membership would appreciate learning more about the final work of the man behind Ripcord: Screaming Eagles Under Siege, Vietnam 1970. The book, will be available in early June.



All my best,
John Wurm
Quayside Publishing Group
Marketing Manager • Military/History/Music
612-344-8157

Gentlemen,

My name is John Stoneburg and I commanded the 65th MP Company (Airborne) at Forward Operating Base Kalsu from Jan 2005 to Sep 2005. FOB Kalsu was named for your 1LT Bob Kalsu. From the second I first read the sign at the center of FOB Kalsu (picture attached) during my first tour in Iraq (Feb 2004) I've been intrigued with the story.

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Ripcord Reunion Registration 2010

Firestore Ripcord Association Reunion, October 6 – 10, 2010

Radisson Hotel, Ft Worth, Texas

Yes, I'll be there!

I have not attended a Reunion since 1997 and have not received a Ripcord Coin.

NAME _____ PHONE _____

ADDRESS _____ UNIT IN 'NAM _____

CITY _____ STATE _____ ZIP _____

Will a family member(s) or guest be sharing your accommodations? Yes No

How many including you? _____. If yes what are their names? (For name tag purposes only).

Arrival Date _____ Departure Date _____

Registration fee of \$_____ is enclosed for #_____ Adults and #_____ children under 18.
\$50 for children under 18. For adults see discounts below !

DISCOUNTS FOR EARLY REGISTRATION:

Before June 30, 2010 – \$75 per adult

July 1 through 31, 2010 – \$80 per adult

August 1 through September 1, 2010 – \$85 per adult

After September 1, 2010 – \$90 per adult

Your registration fee covers the cost of the hospitality room, snacks and beverages, and dinner on Saturday.

Registration fee is due no later than September 30, 2010.

Make your check payable to "RIPCORDER ASSOCIATION"

Mail your check with this form to:

Lee Widjeskog, 493 Stillman Ave., Bridgeton, NJ 08302.

If you have questions call Lee at 856-451-1108 before 30 September 2010

AGENDA

- Wednesday, October 6:** Hospitality suite opens at 1200 hours. (Self guided tours and shopping)
- Thursday, October 7:** Hospitality suite opens at 1200 hours. (Golf in the AM) (Self guided tours)
- Friday, October 8:** Hospitality 1200 Hours. Ladies raffle 1900 hours (7 PM)
- Saturday, October 9:** Business meeting for association business in Hospitality room.
Dinner with cash bar starting at 1730 hours done by 2200 hours.
- Sunday, October 10:** Homeward bound

Thursday Golf Outing (not included in the registration fee) Check here if you will play

HOTEL RESERVATIONS MUST BE MADE SEPARATELY AND BY SEPTEMBER 22, 2010

USE THE OTHER FORM OR CALL 800-333-3333,

ASK FOR HOTEL RESERVATIONS AND REFER TO THE GROUP CODE: "RIPCORDER"

Hotel Registration 2010

Firebase Ripcord Association Reunion, October 6 - 10, 2010

Hotel Reservation form for
Radisson Hotel Fort Worth South
100 Alta Mesa East Boulevard
Fort Worth, TX 76134
Phone: (800) 333-3333 (Central Reservations)
817-293-3088 (Direct Hotel Reservation)
Group code: **RIPCORD**

Group Room Rate: \$79 per day + tax.
A deposit for the first night's room and tax or a Credit Card Number
is required to guarantee this reservation.

Your Name: _____ Telephone # _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

Arrival Date: _____ Departure Date: _____ No. of Rooms _____

Roommate Name(s): _____

Room needs*: _____

** Although we cannot guarantee special requests, every effort will be made to meet your request.*

Deposit Enclosed: _____ Credit Card Number: _____ Exp: _____

Cardholder Signature Authorizing Hotel's Use of Credit Card: _____

PLEASE NOTE: *Those guests sending a cash deposit should be aware that a credit card imprint and valid, state-issued ID will be necessary upon check in. Should you wish to pay for your stay with cash, a credit card imprint and valid ID will still be required upon arrival to secure your accommodations.*

All cash payments are accepted upon departure.

Check-in time: 3:00 PM (1500 hrs) Check-out Time: 12:00 PM (1200 hrs)

To confirm reservations, please return form to the hotel or call by September 22, 2010.

We look forward to seeing you in October!

INCOMING MAIL

Continued from Page 5

I just finished reading "Hell on a Hilltop" by MG (R) Ben Harrison and am even more proud to have served in the hell hole called FOB Kalsu. I have always believed the Army is a small family, but even more so now. The company I had the great pleasure of commanding (65th MP CO (ABN) out of Fort Bragg) used the motto Ripcord. My call sign was Ripcord 6 and interestingly enough, our TOC at FOB Kalsu was known as Ripcord Base. I also served as a squad leader and platoon sergeant in A CO, 1/501 Parachute Infantry Regiment before I went to OCS and remember reading the stories of the 501st (all battalions) in Vietnam. The coincidences alone made me think hard.

As I read the book, I quickly learned that FSB Ripcord was truly Hell on a Hilltop. The similarities with FOB Kalsu were too obvious to avoid. While we received no where near the enemy onslaught you heroes did in 1970, the importance of the two bases is evident. FOB Kalsu sits at the gateway to the Triangle of Death (Al Hilla, Karbala, Babylon) and is the intersection of two major routes. The East-West route is the primary route insurgents from Iran would take to get to the Triangle of Death. It is a key piece of terrain in that we were there to stop insurgents, build the local community, and keep the North-South route free of obstructions. At the time, FOB Kalsu was a tiny base (less than 1 square mile) with a Brigade HQ, BN HQ, and my company. I provide direct support to the 2nd Marine Division, 3rd Infantry Division, and Polish Division within my sector which covered ~60 kilometers of the North-South route. Additionally, I had 1 platoon training Iraqi Highway police and 1 platoon 4 hours East training border patrol along the Iranian border.

FOB Kalsu received mortar fire and rocket fire on a near daily basis while I was there. While many soldiers in Iraq would relax on FOBs, my company kept a high state of alert at all times. Rocket and mortar attacks were high adventure as the Iraqis don't aim, they just lob and so there is no way to see how the rounds will land. This was unnerving as a commander trying to keep my troopers safe. On more than one occasion my 1SG and I would be yelling to get folks in bunkers while trying to determine the best route ourselves as the rounds flew overhead and impacted around us. The soldiers of my company would often comment that they only felt safe out in sector inside the armored vehicles. It was not uncommon to encounter 10 improvised explosive devices on the North-South route in a single day (although this came with peaks and valleys of activity) or an ambush from insurgents working their way West to Karbala. I was blessed with an exceptional

cohort of experienced veterans, 95% of which were on their second deployment and 80% on their third.

Living at Kalsu, the Ripcord paratroopers rarely slept and were constantly hyper alert until we moved 600kms north to Mosul in 15 Sep 2005. While FSB Ripcord was the high ground, FOB Kalsu lay in the low ground immediately West and South of the two major routes. This made it very easy for insurgent attacks via indirect and direct fire. After we left, the FOB boundaries were extended and the population increased 4-5 fold. My former driver (a cook, not an MP) was recently based at Kalsu again and told me it is no longer recognizable and quite a bit safer than when we were there. At least some progress was made there! No Ripcord trooper was immune to hard work and direct contact with the enemy. Every cook, clerk, commo, supply, and medic in the company came in direct contact with the enemy. While we were an MP company, we trained every soldier to do everyone else's job before we left for Iraq and it was not uncommon for the low density personnel to do MP jobs. We were a cohesive team and while I read "Hell on a Hilltop" I was filled with pride to learn we achieved what the greatest heroes of our era did everyday on FSB Ripcord.

I have rambled on long enough. I just visited your website and will continue to read through it. I am sending off a donation for \$100 as a thanks for the heroism of the troopers on FSB Ripcord and the honor of serving on a small FOB in Iraq named in honor of a veteran of the horrific fight you endured.

Please add me to your mailing list, I would love to read the newsletter.

One final note, the story of how I learned of the book is interesting in and of itself. I currently work in the Pentagon at HQDA, G-3/5/7, Force Management office as a Major. One of my coworkers and I were discussing coincidences and he brought up his assignment to Fort Ben Harrison when MG Ben Harrison was the commander. I wondered if he was related to the former President, so did an internet search and came across the book "Hell on a Hilltop." I immediately ordered the book from Amazon.com and laughed with my coworker at yet another coincidence!

I thank you for your service, and as the son of a Vietnam Vet, thank you for your continued dedication and patriotism.

Respectfully,
John Stoneburg